

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN P. LAURIELLO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

MOLLY GRAHAM

WESTMONT, NEW JERSEY

MARCH 11, 2014

TRANSCRIPT BY

MOLLY GRAHAM

Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second interview session with John Lauriello on March 11, 2014, in Haddon Township, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Molly Graham: Molly Graham.

SI: Thank you very much for having us here again.

John Lauriello: Glad to have you.

SI: To begin, we want to pick up around the same time that we left off in the first interview, which is when you were getting discharged from the Marine Corps. Can you tell us a little bit about where you got discharged and remind us what month and year that was?

JL: Yes. I got discharged on January the 11th, 1946, from Bainbridge, Maryland. It was very interesting, because I had just come back from occupying Japan, which meant that I'm being discharged six months after the war was over. By that time, people had forgotten us completely. When I got discharged at Bainbridge, Maryland, I got out on the road to hitchhike from Bainbridge home and could not get a ride. Everybody's going by, basically thumbed their nose. Finally, two ex-Army men came along in an old flivver, because that's all that was available around that time. They picked me up and you wouldn't believe it, but they dropped me off within two blocks of where I wanted to go. So, that was my discharge date and my getting home. Unbeknownst to me, they had arranged a little party on my father's side. That turned into quite a bash. It was nice.

SI: Did you have any plans for what you were going to do at that point? You had already worked at RCA. You had a job there.

JL: I had already worked at RCA and you had ninety days to make up your mind. It may seem odd to people who haven't experienced it, but it's a traumatic experience to go from civilian life into the military, but it's a bigger experience coming out. If you think about it, when you go in, you're going into a regimented environment, where they feed you, they clothe you, everything. You're taken care of. Then, you get used to this kind of treatment and, when you come out, now, you're on your own. I had no civilian clothes to put on. I had to wear my uniform for a month. You couldn't buy anything. There were no clothes available. When I finally did buy a suit, eleven bucks--now, you couldn't even get a pants leg or a pocket for eleven bucks. [laughter]

SI: I know the Army had the "Ruptured Duck" that they would put on the uniform [the Honorable Service Lapel Button].

JL: Yes.

SI: Did you have the same thing in the Marines?

JL: Yes. In fact, I have my greens upstairs, the ones I wore home. You wouldn't believe it. You would think they belonged to my little grandson, who's thirteen years old.

SI: [laughter] You mentioned this experience with people not giving you a ride home.

JL: Right.

SI: Did you have similar reactions when you went around in uniform for that first month or so?

JL: I didn't really notice it. I didn't. Maybe I just ignored it, but I wore my big green, I call "horse blanket," which was the overcoat that we had. It went almost down to your ankles. I took it to the tailor and had a three-quarter coat made out of it. I wore that thing back and forth to RCA, when I started back to RCA, all through the winter, because I got out in January, like I said, and I had until, like, May or June before the weather got nice and you could wear other things.

SI: Did they try to get you to join the Reserves at that point?

JL: They tried to, yes, but, after my experiences, I wanted no connections with anything. I wanted out, period. I never joined any military [veterans' groups], like VFW or American Legion or anything, because I didn't want to sit around listening to a bunch of drunks relate something that I had been through probably ten times worse than them. I could listen to my own drunken stories without listening to theirs. So, I never got involved in that, either.

SI: What about the Marine Corps League? Did they have a League chapter in your area?

JL: In Philly, when I got discharged, I have no idea, because I never really looked into it. I didn't join the League until about 1995, I guess it was. I had been requested to give a talk to the Historical Society in Haddon Township about Iwo Jima. When I did, a couple days later, I got a call from somebody around the corner who was the Commandant of the Marine Corps League here in Oaklyn. So, he took me over and signed me up. That's the first time I ever belonged to anything. In fact, I still belong to it, but I don't go too much anymore, for the same reason I didn't go in the beginning. Like, even labor unions, I went--I think I went to one labor union meeting and decided they were all full of crap and never went back again. So, that's me.

SI: Which union was that? Do you remember?

JL: Oh, gee whiz, United Electrical Workers or something like that. I belonged to the union and my opinion of the union was that it protects you from the whims of somebody who gets up on the wrong side of the bed in the morning and they meet you the first thing in the morning and say, "I don't like your smile on your face." It protects you from that kind of stuff.

SI: I think you said you had ninety days to decide.

JL: Yes. I wanted to mention that. Yes, you had ninety days and I think I spent--I wasted; not wasted, but used--eighty-eight of them, trying to make up my mind what to do. I mean, I came this close to going back in again, but, then, I took the bull by the horns and went over to RCA and got myself reinstated.

SI: During that time, did you make use of the 52/20 clause?

JL: Yes, I did. It's funny you should mention those things, yes, seems like so long ago, the 52/20. You know what that was?

MG: You will have to remind me.

JL: Twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. [Editor's Note: The GI Bill included a "52/20" clause, which provided twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks to discharged servicemen while they looked for work.]

SI: Were there any other parts of the GI Bill that you wanted to take advantage of?

JL: I used it when I got married, to buy a house. In fact, that's mentioned on that recording we made the last time.

SI: Right. We mentioned that last time.

JL: Yes.

SI: You also mentioned that you considered going to college, but ultimately decided against it.

JL: That's right, because I had my mother and my younger sister, who had nothing. We were living--the three of us were living--in a small street in South Philly and the period before I went in the service and when I came out wasn't all that prosperous, but there were little jobs to be had. So, I had to grab up one of those as soon as I could and carry on the support of the family.

SI: Were you living in the same neighborhood that you had gone into the service from?

JL: Yes, essentially. Every neighborhood was like an individual little city. You could do anything you wanted to do in your neighborhood. You could buy anything that you had to buy. So, that was it. I mean, you were within walking distance of any of your family requirements.

SI: Was there any way that the neighborhood had changed that stood out when you came back?

JL: Not really, no. Those neighborhoods didn't change in those days. The houses always looked the same. The steps always looked the same, the white marble steps. It was downtown. It was nice. It was nice neighborhoods, trolley cars rumbling up and down the streets. That was your way of life. I had an uncle who came to visit us after the war and he used to drive his car up and I lived on a small street. He would park his car wherever it was convenient on one of the bigger streets, adjacent to the small street, and he would leave it there. Then, I had to go get it and move it up the street and park it in front of our house. [laughter] I don't know whether he couldn't or wouldn't, but he never moved the car after that. Any place we went, I would drive him. The streets were such, if you wanted to park in-between two cars, you had to put your one wheel up on the pavement across the street, and then, bounce back down again and hook in and get your position and lock it in place. A funny thing--this has nothing to do with our discussion

here--but I bought a '46 Dodge Business Coupe. It's a nice, sporty little thing. I had it parked in front of my house and I'm sitting in there. Downtown, the houses were small, the streets were small. So, I'm sitting in there, reading the paper or doing something in my living room, near the window, and I hear this crunch out front. I said, "What the hell was that?" Here's a guy coming down the street with a pushcart that was made from the wheels, like, of the old trash collector trucks--not trucks, horse and wagons. They had the big hubs on the outside, about this big around and about that far out from the wheel. He ran one of those hubs right down my door. So, I ran out and says, "What the hell are you doing?" So, he looked at me, he said, "What do you want, my pushcart?" [laughter]

SI: You got a 1946 Dodge.

JL: Dodge.

SI: I have heard that it was very difficult, once they started making cars again, to get one. You had to be on waiting lists.

JL: Yes, absolutely. Everything was tough. I mentioned the clothes. There were no clothes available. Automobiles, I know my father got a hold of a 1936 Plymouth sedan and it was a horrible means of conveyance, but we used to take it to the Shore and stuff like that. That's all you had. So, you made do with what you had. Like today, you take what you've got and run with it.

SI: Coming back to your family after being away for so long and being through the rigors of combat, was there any--friction is not the right word, but any difficulty--readjusting to life with your family?

JL: Yes. My mother and sister, no, but my father, he was always sort of dominant. I was taller than him. He was, like, five-foot-seven and I was just a shade under six-foot. He used to be in the trucking business and, periodically, I would go with him at night and stuff like that. I remember just sounding off a couple times to him, "You're dealing with a different person now," because when I went away, it was, "I'll see you." That's all there was to it. I said, "It's not the same kid that went away." I said, "I've been through a lot of things and I don't really give a crap." We got that thing straightened out right off the bat. He introduced me to a friend of his, who was in their--they had some kind of a little financial corporation, they called it, where people bought shares and they made loans and all that sort of stuff and they had a treasurer. Well, one day, we were in town and he took me into this little nightclub, downtown again. This guy, I forget what his name was right now, but, when we came out of the place, he said to me, "What do you think of Mr. Foley?" or whatever the guy's name was. I said, "He looks like a goddamn thief to me." He says, "What do you mean he looks like a thief?" I says, "You asked me what I thought." I said, "That's what I think. He's a thief." So, about two weeks later, he says, "You were right. The guy took the money and absconded with it, took the whole treasury."

SI: Wow. I know that in communities where everybody came from the same ethnic background or emigrated from the same area, they would have organizations like that.

JL: Yes.

SI: Was that the basis of that organization?

JL: It wasn't quite that spread out. It was all family, because I really came from a large family. Between the uncles and the cousins and stuff like that, we had, like, nine or ten people running the thing.

SI: Were you related to the treasurer?

JL: I was the assistant treasurer. My cousin had just finished college, as an accountant, and I helped him with the filling in the ledgers and stuff like that and keeping the balances going.

SI: Who was the one who ran off?

JL: Oh, that wasn't this thing. This was a different organization altogether.

SI: All right.

JL: Altogether a different organization. I had nothing to do with that, except I had some money in it. That went bye-bye.

SI: The one where the guy ran off with the money, was that servicing the Italian community?

JL: That was more or less, yes, like that.

SI: What was the family organization you were talking about?

JL: What was it?

SI: You said you were the assistant treasurer.

JL: Yes. It was a loyalty mutual beneficial association and people would put money in there, as savings, and then, if anybody needed a loan, you'd loan them money out of there and they'd pay it back. It went on for about ten, fifteen years, something like that. Then, finally, we weren't licensed or anything, see. So, then, one day, we said, "We're treading on thin ice here. All these half-assed politicians from city hall will come down here and put the nab on us and somebody's going to go to jail," [laughter] I mean, not that anything was crooked about it. You're either lawful or you're unlawful, and the only reason that is is because somebody made a law. If they didn't make the law, it wouldn't be unlawful.

SI: Did that start after the war?

JL: After the war, 1946. It went on until about 1956, something like that. We used to meet once a week and the loans went out through the members. Then, you do all your transacting wherever

you were during the week, and then, on Tuesday nights, we'd meet at a certain place and transact all the business, bring all the accounts up-to-date and stuff like that.

SI: Later that spring, you went back to RCA.

JL: Yes, April, around the beginning of April.

SI: What were you doing at that point? What was your job then?

JL: When I came back, it was as a first class wireman. We were building transmitters and receivers for Russia.

SI: Really?

JL: That went over like a lead balloon with me and other people. They were very busy plotting their next war and we're building the equipment for them.

SI: That must have been cut off relatively quickly, though.

JL: It didn't last too long, right. It's interesting. Then, later on, this is many years later, they were working on a very highly secretive job in RCA and very few people had access to it or clearance. Guess who was the manager? a Japanese.

SI: Was that project a leftover Lend-Lease program?

JL: I think no; well, possibly. It was, like, a new job, but where it fit on the scale, I don't know, whether it was ordered before the war or after, during.

SI: After that project ended, where did you go next?

JL: That is sort of jumping around now. Now, what I wanted to do is give you a feel for the conditions in 1946, how different they were than they are now. Like, when I went back to RCA--well, even before I went away--I was commuting back and forth to RCA in Camden. Now, I lived, basically, maybe three miles from RCA and never heard of RCA until I got a job there. How I got the job there was, it was in the summer, 1941. I graduated in June 1941 and the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. Well, in September of 1941, I was sitting in my uncle's barbershop in South Philly and this neighborhood fellow, who everybody knew--like I said, everybody knew everybody in the neighborhood, right--so, he comes in and he gets a haircut. Then, when he's leaving, he says to me, "I'm going over to Camden. You want to take a ride with me?" Well, I had been to Camden maybe two or three times in my life and riding over there was sort of a novelty. So, I said, "Oh, sure, I'll go with you." So, where's he going? He's going over to get his layoff papers from RCA. So, basically, my question is, "What is RCA?" and then, I found out, Radio Corporation of America, big corporation, etc., and so forth. So, I went over with him and, while he's in the personnel office getting his papers lined up for layoff, I walked up, brazen as brass, to the hiring counter and said, "Are there any jobs available?" So, they said to me, "What can you do?" I said, "Nothing," I says, "but I'm a fast learner." I said, "If

you got something you want to teach me," I says, "I'm sure I can learn it." [laughter] So, I got a job on the night shift in the plating department. Boy, did I learn that fast--what I learned was get the hell out of there, because I'm on night shift with stinking acids all over the place. It was murder, but a significant thing is, I could go from my house in South Philly all the way over to Camden and back for twenty cents. The trolley cars were fifteen cents roundtrip and the ferry was a nickel roundtrip, two-and-a-half cents to go across the ferry as a pedestrian. Then, when you got on the other side, there was a long block from the ferry dock to the RCA building. The RCA buildings were right on Delaware Avenue, right at the corner there. In that block, you could get your pants pressed, you'd get your shoes repaired, you could buy a box lunch, anything you want. They were all individual stores with the corrugated roof sticking out to the pavement, stuff like that. I just wanted to bring that to light, how cheap things were--paper, two cents, a loaf of Italian bread, a nickel, all that kind of stuff. In my first job there, I was making forty-five cents an hour--try that one on [laughter]--but, for a dollar, you could go out on a date, take the trolley car, go in town, go to the movies, go for a snack afterwards and come home again and still have about thirty cents in your pocket, see. So, that was the difference. So, everything is relative.

SI: When you came back from the war, was it still pretty much the same? Had there been a lot of inflation?

JL: No. It was basically the same.

SI: You were still living in Philadelphia and commuting to Camden.

JL: To Camden, correct.

SI: Tell us a little bit about getting back into the swing of work. Was it an adjustment?

JL: No. I was in electronics in the service anyway. I think I told you that, but, again, they spent all that time and money to train me to a pretty high level of electronics engineering and, when we hit Iwo Jima, I wound up with the riflemen, because there's no equipment to repair in a battle like that. It's either working or it's in pieces and, once it's in pieces, *adios*, good-bye, Jack.

SI: You mentioned in the first interview that you had been trained in television work.

JL: Yes.

SI: Was that before or after the war?

JL: That's before.

SI: Before.

JL: Before the war, but I was working night shift and I told you--trolley car all the way down to Front and Delaware Avenue to get the ferry--I went to this place called Television Training Institute, which was on Market Street. It was very convenient for me to get off at that point,

from the trolley car, while I'm going to work, and go to this institute. It was right on Market Street. So, I did that. I think I went there once or twice a week, something like that, and this is all the time while I'm doing plater's helper's work at RCA, which I didn't really appreciate. I went in there and I learned schematics, how to fabricate chassis, assemble the chassis, wire the chassis. By the time I left there, I had built a five-inch television. The picture was this wide.

SI: Three inches wide.

JL: About that high--postage stamp, yes. I saw Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympics, I guess--not live, left over.

MG: On your little TV?

JL: On my little TV, yes. I left to go to the service. I left both from RCA and the television place. I never did get the TV. I left it there. I left all my tools there. I just went, but, now, from the RCA, it was a different story. I just left there, too, but, when I went back to get my tools, one of the older and wiser people there said, "You don't want to do this. You want to go to personnel and sign out legally." I said, "Okay." So, I took the guy's advice and went to personnel and signed out legally. It was one of the best things I ever did. That's what entitled me to come back after the service was over with, like a guaranteed job.

SI: Did you retain any seniority?

JL: Yes, I did. I was going to say, by doing that, I retained my seniority. When I came back from the service, I started in RCA with, like, five years of seniority, as a freshman. That saved me many, many times when they had slowdowns. That little five years came in handy.

SI: Going back, you were on this project; go ahead.

JL: Oh, and another thing that got me, they had a policy there that they would send you the difference between what you earned in the service versus what you earned in RCA for the last month you were there. So, I got a check in the mail one day from RCA and I sent it back home to my mother. In fact, I got an allotment for her while I was gone. She made more money than I did while I was in there. The system was, they would give half of my pay to her and they would match the other half and give her the full pay, where I only got half. So, that's the way that worked, but it was good. I guess towards the end, she was probably maybe getting, like, seventy dollars a month. Now, the rent downtown was only twenty-five dollars a month for the place. So, the seventy bucks would take care of the electric and gas, all utilities. There were no phones. Nobody had a phone.

SI: Did your mother or sister work during the war?

JL: My mother worked, yes. She worked in--my folks were separated. She worked for Blauners, which was an apparel store in the Center City, like Lit Brothers, Gimbel's, stuff like that. My sister was younger than me. She's going to high school. In fact, they're all dead, my younger sister, older sister. I'm the only survivor of the whole crew.

SI: Going back to RCA, you were working for a little while on this project. Was it transmitters that were going to Russia?

JL: Yes, receivers and transmitters going, yes.

SI: What happened after that?

JL: Well, what happened after that, I say about six months to eight months or something like that, they had a slowdown. I was working on a production line. When I first went in there, they'd give you so many crimps and so many solders. I remember, this was TCS and I had two blue wires on the socket and crimps and all that sort of stuff. Then, I used to walk around and see what was going on, because I would do them pretty fast. It didn't actually move on the line. You had racks between you. You'd take one off of this rack, put it here, do it, and then, put it on this rack and, eventually, it'd go down the line, but you could get periods where you could walk around a little bit and see what was going on. I remember, I walked up to one guy there and he's doing bus wire, non-insulated bus wire, on ceramic switches. So, I'm standing there, looking. I said, "That looks interesting." So, smartass, he said, "You think you could do that?" I said, "I don't have a doubt in the world." So, I did one for him and did a couple of them. He said, "That's fine. That's fine." So, I got that job, doing that. Then, there came a slowdown and the boss, Fred Harmer--now, that's seventy years ago [laughter]--he got about five or six or eight of us off of this line. Like little soldiers, we lined up single file and we marched around the buildings. Now, there were a lot of buildings for RCA in Camden. At the time, I was in #17. He marched us over, crossed the ramps, didn't have to go outside. You can go from building to building over the ramps and stuff like that. So, we went over the ramps. We went to #8 Building and the boss there came down the line, looking at us. We're all against the wall. He came down to me, says, "I'll take this man." Now, that guy's name was Frank Eisenlore and I worked with him for maybe eight or nine months. During that time, I was doing wiring again and I was doing repairing at night. Evidently, he liked me and I used to get overtime and, once in a while, we'd go out to have a beer. I remember, he took me out, with a couple of guys and, oh, what an experience. We go in this taproom and I was only eighteen. So, he orders for me a liverwurst sandwich with onions and mustard, a shot of scotch and a beer. Wow, I got sick. [laughter] Oh, my god, did I get sick, because I hated scotch. Even to this day, I can't stand scotch. I mean, to me, that's a treatment instead of a treat, but we did that several times. We went to the circus one time. It was a nice arrangement, and then, when I left, I left working with Frank, he used to write me letters and I'd write him letters. I'd tell him, as I went on, "I'm taking the electronic courses," and stuff like that. I'd tell him what phases we were in and stuff like that. He says, "When you come back, you're going to have it knocked," and he used a little profanity. He said, "These asses over here don't know what the hell they're talking about," he says, "but, when you come back, you can show them," but, when I went back, he wasn't there anymore. I never saw him again, but I made out well. Yes, I worked for him, and then, there was another layoff of the wiring group. So, I got laid off again, just when I got married, by coincidence. Anyway, the personnel sent out this notice that they were going to rehire, like, about eight or ten. So, I was one of them. So, I went back and it wasn't back as a wireman. It was back for test equipment repairs. So, they gave us this written test and I came out number one, because, like I said, I had these courses in the Marine Corps, no problem. I knew all the ins and outs. So, all

the tricky questions that were on there, I knew all the answers to them and that worked out well. So, I got a job maintaining a big merry-go-round that used to be used to automatically check transformers, power transformers and horizontal output transformer. Like, a power transformer will have a primary--you're familiar?

MG: No.

JL: They'll have a primary winding. Then, they'll have a secondary winding, like, for the plates, for the high voltage, and then, they'll have filament windings in there. So, one transformer, like for the 630 ten-inch television that the RCA first came out with, around '46 and '48--you probably don't remember even seeing them, but they were about this wide. They had a rectangular tube about this big, black-and-white. They had thirty tubes in them. They were, like, 350 watts. You plugged that in, it was like having, like, four one-hundred watt bulbs plugged in at one time and people in those days would pull their hair out if they saw four one-hundred watt bulbs burning at one time, [laughter] but, for the TV, it was acceptable, one of those things. Anyway, the transformer for those things had, like, about seven windings on them. The transformer was this high and it must have weighed twenty pounds. It's all iron and copper windings and stuff like that, but we used to check those and I used to maintain that machine. It made, like, eight or nine different checks of that thing, like make sure it wasn't shorted and the right ratios and all that sort of stuff. The machine had a couple of flaws and the people who used to load the transformers on--oh, the way it operated, the thing went around, automatically, and it went through all these test positions. It had relays that used to put a different color ink on a little piece of paper that went with each transformer. That was an automatic thing that worked with that tray. The guy that put the transformers on, a big, husky guy would put these transformers on, grab them by the wires and put them on, and, like I said, they were heavy. They had the girls--there are like four girls in a row--right after him and one would grab the primaries and put them in these clips, one would grab the secondaries and put them in those clips. By the time it got into the test position, all the wires were in their proper clips, but this guy, he found out that if you put a short across the primary, it would go around and trip the ratio position, which would put a red reject thing across all the tapes. So, that would render the machine inoperative. He was on night shift, and then, the four girls would sit down and he would sit down and they'd wait until they got the maintenance man to come around and correct the problem. So, the boss come to me one day--I was on day shift--he came to me one day, he says, "You've got to do something about this. This is horrible." So, I said, "I'll look into it." So, I did look into it and I found the solution for it and worked it out, and it was nice. Now, when the guy put the clip in that went around, that's the only position that was "reject" and the rest of them picked right up and checked the transformers. They had a reward system in those days. For a good suggestion, you could get some money. He said, "It'll be worth a lot of money to you to get this thing settled, see, because you've got all their pay, plus, the non-output of the transformers," and stuff like that, but guess what happens? I get the thing going, correct this problem, and then, he gives me an argument. I got twenty-five dollars for it. I felt like ripping it out, but, if you rip it out, then, they'll rip you out, because you're on the losing end of that bargain.

SI: Was that, maybe not common, but not unheard of, for people to basically sabotage their machines, so that they could get out of work?

JL: When they could, they would. Then, you had to be very astute to find out who's doing what, and then, if possible, just quietly solve the problem. All of a sudden, they find out that it doesn't work anymore, [laughter] but they don't know who fouled them up. After that, then, there was another layoff there and I got laid off from there--go ahead.

SI: Before we go forward, you said the first layoff was around the time you got married.

JL: Yes.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about getting married? When was that?

JL: Yes.

MG: How did you meet your wife?

JL: Coming up. I told you, there's a lot of buildings in Camden. I was working in a building down by the bridge, minding my own business, away from the main configuration there. I got this request to go back and work in another department for a while. So, I did. I went back in there and they had the labs on one side, in the hallway, and then, the offices on the other side, with windows, so [that] you could look across. So, I'm in one side and who's on the other side? [laughter] So, that's the way it was. So, it was, "Hello, how are you?" and all that sort of stuff. So, like I said, I was minding my own business and you never know what would have happened the other way around, if they would have just left me alone, [laughter] but it worked out good. So, we bought a house in Southwest Philadelphia and stayed there about a year, and then, we moved over to here.

SI: Where did you live when you initially moved to New Jersey?

JL: When I first moved to Jersey?

SI: Yes.

JL: Right here.

SI: Same house?

JL: [Mr. Lauriello imitates a New Jersey accent] Right here, right here.

SI: You have lived in this house the whole time you have been in New Jersey.

JL: Yes. We've been here--well, we came here in 1950. So, that's, like, what? sixty-four years.

MG: Long time.

JL: Yes. I've rebuilt this house, like, inside, twice, at least twice.

MG: Are you still "Mr. Fix-It" around the house?

JL: No. I'm past that stage. I look at them, I would like to do it, but I just can't. You know how old I am, right?

MG: I have an idea--ninety?

JL: Ninety-one. I'll be ninety-one in March, the 31st. Something just leaves you. I mean, you want to do it. I've had plumbers come in and I've never had them in my life. Nobody ever came in--the washer, the dryer, the garbage disposal, everything, I took care of it all--and, now, I have to sit back and I go like this [Mr. Lauriello gestures with his hands].

MG: That is tough.

JL: It is, it is. That's one of the worst conditions you can get into. I'm not saying you have to be in any condition at all, but, if you have to make a choice between being mentally alert and physically disabled, that's a bad situation, compared to physically able and mentally disabled, where you really don't know what's going on anyway, like Alzheimer's. I'm not saying you should have it, I should have it or anybody else, but I'm just comparing conditions. When you're aware what's going on, it makes it very tough, but, when you're not, it makes it tough on the other people.

SI: You said that there was a second layoff. You were laid off from the test equipment section.

JL: Yes.

SI: Around what time was that?

JL: Oh, '50s.

SI: Early 1950s?

JL: '52, '53, somewhere in there.

SI: How long were you out of work? When did they call you back?

JL: I wasn't out of work at all. I was lucky to get transferred from one situation to another. That job that I just described to you, with the transformer and all, was test equipment repair. Now, I went from--and I was in production then with that circle, the merry-go-round--then, I got transferred over to engineering, to take care of their equipment, and that was an entirely different ball game. That was signal generators, oscilloscopes, and all that sort of stuff. I took care of that for a while. Then, while I was doing that, I became aware of another occupation, lab technician, and I applied for that. I got a hard time for that, because, by this time, I had, like, nineteen years in, I think nineteen, twenty years. When the people that were already in this occupation heard that I'm coming in there, they raised all kinds of hell, see, because I would be senior people to them and they didn't want that kind of stuff. So, anyway, it was sort of cloak-and-dagger and I

kept getting interviews and I got accepted to take these jobs, but, then, the word would get back to the shop stewards and they would put a kibosh on it, see. I'm hired on Monday, I'm not hired on Tuesday, see. So, it gets kind of disappointing after a while. So, finally, I went over to Advanced Technology Labs and they were doing kinescope recordings and stuff like that, right up my alley, because I was into television and all that sort of stuff, like I told you. So, they said, "Okay, we'll take you on." Then, the next thing you know, I get the word that they're not taking me on there, too, because of this rhubarb that was raised by the union. Then, all of a sudden, I got this other note from the boss of the place where I was going. He said, "Send them over," he says, "and I'll put my foot right where it fits;" so, good. So, that's how I got my break. I went in and, after thirty days or ninety days, they couldn't do anything about it anyway. So, then, I stayed there. Then, I worked on, oh, fantastic projects. I worked in kinescope recording, like I told you. That's before any of these tapes or discs or anything ever came out. I worked in plasma generation, which was electronic. I worked in electrostatic printing, of which I have several patents. Then, I worked in masers and lasers. Lasers are used today on these little discs, the DVDs. In fact, one of the last projects I worked on before I retired was the big version of the DVD.

SI: The Laserdisc?

JL: With the laser cutting the thing and playing it back again. We had it down to the point where one turn on that disc gave you a complete frame on the TV set. There was that much information in there. I worked, like I said, on the masers. I went out to Goldstone [NASA's Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex in California], out in Arizona, and put a maser in their dish, the big reflective dishes. I was to Canada several times. I went to Arthur D. Little for an acceptance test on the helium refrigerator. I went to Air Products and Chemical up in Allentown for their refrigerator. We had two refrigerators working, helium refrigerators, and they were mechanical refrigerators that got the temperature down inside to minus 450 degrees. That's a couple of degrees above absolute zero. Now, you know about absolute zero?

MG: Yes.

JL: You do?

MG: Yes. What was the purpose of those refrigerators?

JL: To operate the masers. The masers operated at that temperature. You could see it. You had gain in there. You could see the signal's gain and, as the temperature came up, you could see this--and it didn't take much. We used to pump them with the proper configuration to preserve the helium. We'd pump them down to, like, 1.9 degrees. I used to design the tables with the hole in the middle and we had a four-and-a-half-ton magnet to get the proper magnetic field and the proper mechanism to put this structure in to get it down into that temperature. I used to design all that stuff, and established the vacuum systems in the labs and the distribution of the gases, like the helium and nitrogen gases. I used to order and handle the nitrogen liquid and the helium liquid. I remember one three-channel maser we had there. I designed the whole damn thing. I ordered the refrigerator from Air Products and designed the structure that went inside it. So,

when it came down, that damn thing went in there and tightened up and heat sunk each part that was supposed to be and it fit like a glove, let me put it that way, three-finger glove. [laughter]

SI: You went to the Advanced Technology Lab in 1960, thereabouts.

JL: I would guess.

SI: At that point, had you been taking additional training or did you learn everything on the job?

JL: I learned it on the job and I read, like I got the book explaining color television and read the whole thing from one end to the other. In fact, I borrowed it off a guy down there. It's amazing. I mean, it's not that you're so smart, but it's that other people are so goddamn dumb. Like, I borrowed this book off of one of the guys down there. I read it, the whole damn thing, and it's quite complex. I don't know if you ever looked into color television or not, but it's quite complex. I would say, "Oh, this is the way this goes and that's the way that goes." He'd say, "Oh, no, it isn't. No, it isn't." I says, "What do you mean it isn't?" I said, "I just read in the book all the steps--front steps and back steps and all that sort of stuff." "Oh, no." "You go according to your way and I'll go according to mine," but I just understood all that stuff. I built, like, four or five black-and-white TVs, starting with a ten and I changed that from a ten to a seventeen. Then, I built a twenty-one and that was the last one I built, was the twenty-one. Then, the RCA-- this was 1963 now, I remember that. I kept my eye on the colors. I was watching them as they came out, demonstrating in the family store and stuff like that. They had one running all the time. I always said, "No, it's not good enough for me and I'm not going to buy one until it meets my expectations." One day, I was in the bowling alley, in this league that I belonged to, and I happened to look around and I saw *The Flintstones* were on this color TV, RCA color TV. I always used to watch out for the yellow. I wanted to make sure that the yellow was yellow and nothing else. I saw this thing. I said, "By God, there it is." Then, by coincidence, they're selling them at the store now, big twenty-one-inch consoles for three hundred bucks. So, up me and two other guys go. I had a station wagon then. So, we went up there and loaded three of them in the station wagon [laughter] and dropped one off here, one off at this house and one off at the other house. That very same day was the day that Kennedy got shot down in Texas. So, I'd just gotten my TV on with color and Kennedy gets shot and they took all the color off the air. Everything was black-and-white and it was for a couple of weeks. I said to them, as a joke, I said, "If they don't get color back soon, my color set's going to be worn out from playing in the black-and-white," one of those things, but that wasn't the case. In fact, all my aunts and uncles used to come over to see the color TV, because nobody had one.

MG: What else did you watch on that TV?

JL: News. They used to have maybe two or three newscasts during the day, at fifteen minutes apiece, and they would be in color, and then, all the rest of it'd go back to black-and-white. Oh, they used to have the color [programs] listed in the paper, the color, black-and-white, one of those things, but, eventually, it switched and they all went on to twenty-four-hour color, as you know. I mean, that's all history.

SI: You were with RCA for such a long time. When I think of corporations in the 1950s and 1960s, I think of "IBM Big Blue," where everyone had to wear the same uniform, basically, of the blue suit. Are there any things that stand out about RCA's corporate culture?

JL: RCA was an excellent company to work for. They used to call it the "RCA Family," and that's what it was. It was a wonderful place to work for. I enjoyed--if I wouldn't have worked there and did what did, I would have set up my cellar to do the same damn thing. That's how good it was. Me and my friends, we'd work there sometimes twenty-four hours straight without ever leaving, because we were so interested. We were in the development stage and we were so interested in what we were doing, getting it to work, that you never even thought about the time. I was there about forty-two years, I guess, plus or minus, and enjoyed every minute of it.

SI: Did they have a lot of activities for the employees?

JL: They had activities. They used to have a twenty-five-year club. ... The Latin Casino out here on Route 70 used to be a nightclub and, every year, the RCA would have a twenty-five-year dinner, banquet, for the people that were there twenty-five years and over. At twenty-five years, you got your choice of whatever gift was offered. There was maybe four or five different choices. Then, every five years after that, you got to pick again. So, I got twenty-five years, I got thirty, thirty-five, forty. I think forty was my last one. I had a silver set, an Accutron watch. I had all kinds of stuff that I got from those things. They used to give you little pins with diamonds in them. It'd be like a ruby for twenty-five years and a single diamond for thirty and two diamonds for thirty-five. You could tell by a guy's tie clip how long he had been working there, but it was a marvelous, marvelous place.

SI: I want to go through some of these projects that you worked on.

JL: Okay, but, when I first went back there, even before I left, they had these government contracts and they had the Morse code "B" stenciled on all the curbs, at the intersections and stuff like that, which stood for, "Beat the promise," because they were very enthusiastic about staying up with their contracts, their obligations. That was all over the place, "Beat the promise."

SI: What kind of security did you have to go through? The masers and lasers, that was probably a government contract.

JL: Oh, yes.

SI: What would you have to go through to work on that?

JL: We were investigated by FBI. In fact, they came around here, to the people next door. All these people are gone now. We're the oldest and we've been here the longest of anybody on this block, but they came around. They would ask.

MG: I bet you have seen it change a lot.

JL: Oh, yes. Some of the houses here that were empty lots, the kids used to play on as empty lots, are now houses and stuff like that.

Katherine Lauriello: Farm, farmland.

JL: The house right across the street, the brick one, the brick front, was an empty lot with hedges.

KL: The deed to my father's house is a fascinating deed. For this property, it says, "No tanning of hides in the cellar. No boiling of bones."

JL: "No bleaching of bones."

KL: "No bleaching of bones," because they would take the marrow from the bones to make candlewax and soap to wash things with; where the outhouse had to be placed in the back, how far away from the back of the house here, this house, and then, how often it needed to be changed. Then, that house there, right on the other side of our garage, right where that fence is, was a very thick brick wall, if you look at the history of this area, and it was all forest.

SI: Wow. How did you decide to come here?

JL: The wife's parents lived right down the street here and we were over there. At the time, some of the shifts I was on started at seven o'clock in the morning. If it was a Sunday night, they'd be over there and they had no car--it would be up to me to drive them home. On a Sunday night, I wouldn't be home until one and two o'clock in the morning, and then, get up at five to be over here by seven. I said, "If I can't be a thousand miles away, I'm going to get on the same block."

SI: [laughter] Your in-laws were there, you were here. How many other people would you say were in the neighborhood? Was it just a handful?

JL: Of relatives?

SI: No, other houses. You said there were a lot of empty lots.

JL: Oh, yes. Well, that house there was an empty lot, that one right there, the one right across the street, two or three of them right down here, a couple properties away. They built on those, just one at a time. The neighborhood was a marvelous neighborhood. They used to have, not block parties, but they used to have summer parties. A couple of families would have these pools in the backyard and we'd go over there and we'd have our little picnics and go in to the pool. Around 1951 or something like that, I bought a Chris-Craft outboard runabout kit and built that right in the old garage. I had an old, beat-up garage out here. It was an old shack, typical country junk, no doors on it. You looked through a couple of boards, see if everything was all right, all that kind of stuff. [laughter] I built my fourteen-footer right in there and the fellow over here had a fourteen-footer and one about four houses down had a fourteen-footer. We would get them all together in the summertime and we'd go down to Lake Lenape, which is not too far from

here, and it's a good-sized lake. We'd launch the boats and we'd have a picnic down there and run around the lake all afternoon and the outboards and that's the kind of life it was here. On these lots, there were all kind of fruit trees growing. My two oldest kids would run around here--they'd come in, in the afternoon, they'd have peach juice all down the front of them and berries and juice--all that kind of stuff. It was nice.

SI: For the record, can you tell us when your kids were born and how your family grew?

JL: Yes. My oldest, Patty, who's now sixty-three, going to be sixty-four, she was born 1950. Then, my son was born 1951 and he's sixty-two, going on sixty-three. Then, there was a little break in there and my middle daughter was born 1957. Katherine here was born 1960. Then, my youngest son, Paul, is now forty-five, and I was forty-five when he was born. I remember saying, "When he's forty-five, I'm going to be ninety," and here it is. I won't tell you how it got here, but it did. All those years, you don't know what--but, he's forty-five, Johnny-come-lately, but the pride and joy of my heart.

SI: Can we go through some of the projects that you worked on at Advanced Technology Labs? You said the first job was kinescopes. What were you doing as part of that project?

JL: Well, kinescopes were involved in the kinescope recording. Now, what that was, it was a receiver, rack type, something for labs, and [the] rack was about this high. Then, on top of that was the kinescope mounted, with all of its deflection circuits and all that sort of stuff. Then, sitting on the same top of the cabinet was this, what they called the Fairchild movie camera, sixteen-millimeter, and the lens of the camera was facing the kinescope face. We would try different types of kinescopes in there with different phosphors. There were UV phosphors and several different--they came by numbers, but the one that was by name was a UV. We would get a program going on there, and then, we would turn the camera on and we would try to record that on film. Since there's a difference in the frequency, the frame rate of the kinescope and the camera, you used to get a condition called "shutter bar." While you were projecting the film that we had just made, you'd see this slow bar going through, like a bunch of salt and pepper. It was just a band of it, though, going through. It would roll through very, very slowly and disappear. Then, the next one'd start up. It was rather objectionable, but it was better than nothing. Then, Ampex came out with recording on tape and that was a real breakthrough and that did away with kinescope recording. Kinescope recording is now on the trash pile. So, they got rid of all that stuff and went on to other things, but the kinescope was used in the process of recording, but Ampex all-electronic recording--they used the slash thing. I don't know if you're aware of that or not.

SI: A little bit.

JL: But, to get all the information on there, they scanned the tape. Like, if a tape was like this, they would start up here and go all the way around the thing. In fact, that was the way that eight--I forget what they called it. It was the box tape.

MG: Eight-track.

JL: Yes, that's what it was, yes, but they're all obsolete. Everything's obsolete, except the DVD.

MG: You must have seen so many things change.

JL: Oh, absolutely. You mention a couple of others here now. We'll probably get into other changes.

SI: How long were you working on the kinescopes before you went on to another project? Would you just work on one project at a time or were you working on numerous projects?

JL: It all depends. Later on, I was working [on], like, four or five at one time. In fact, I remember very definitely, very specifically, one time, during one of our group meetings--like, once a week or once a month, we'd have a group meeting and everybody would report what they're doing. I was, like, the chief lab tech in there. The one guy would get up, the first one would get up, and he'd say, "I'm working on this thing and I'm working with John." The second one would get up, "I'm working with John." They would do this, maybe four or five of them in a row would say this, and, finally, the boss would say, "How the hell many projects is he working on?" [laughter] one of those things, but I could do it.

SI: How were these projects set up? For example, let us stick with the kinescope, you were a lab technician--would you be working under a scientist or researcher?

JL: Yes. We had almost all PhDs and that's why I consider myself very lucky, because I knew what to ask and who to ask. Anything I wanted to know--I mean, on anything, like adhesives, abrasives, greases, anything you could think of--I knew who to ask and I knew if they were shooting me the shit or not, see, because I had a couple of things of my own. I'd be talking to somebody and I could tell. I'd start going like this [pretending to take something off his ears] and they'd say, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm unscrewing my shit filter," [laughter] or I'd shake my leg, my pants. They were my little ways of letting them know that I was on to their bull crap.

MG: I am curious about that dynamic. I am sure you worked with a lot of PhDs and scientists and here you are, self-taught and self-made. Did you feel like you had to prove yourself, even though you were so skilled and innately gifted?

JL: Well, I had a very good reputation. One of the engineers I worked with paid me a tribute one time and said, "He's worth any two engineers in the group," but I never had it all together.

SI: It reminds me almost of the officer-enlisted men relationship in the military. I have interviewed some scientists who worked for RCA and other companies. They said you have to respect what the lab technicians can do and the other members of your team. If you do not, your project will not go forward. Did you ever have any issues with anybody being uncooperative?

JL: Not too many. Most of the problems I had, I created myself. Like I told you, I was dealing with helium, handling of helium. I might as well tell you about it. Helium, normally, is like 4.2 degrees in its natural state when it's inside of a vacuum or something like that. It can't just be out

in the air. If you put it in this glass, first, it'd probably shatter the glass, number one, see, but it would just disappear in vapors. So, in order to have the helium be preserved as a liquid, you put it in its proper environment. Now, that is, you got two Dewars, D-E-W-A-R-S--that's a vacuum thing--and they would be shaped down so far, then, they'd cut in and go down to a tailpiece and there'd be a double wall. Some of them will have taps on them with a valve, where you could actually pump them out or fill them with gas or whatever you wanted to do with them. Some of them were just plain vacuums, untouchable. What I used to do was design these things that would hold these things now. I'd have a table about this high, very heavy, four-by-four legs going down, wouldn't move. That would sit on a steel plate, which was four-by-eight or something like that, for stability, so [that] you wouldn't load one part of the floor down more than another and have it go crashing down. Four-and-a-half tons in one spot, it's enough to crash the floor. So, you get that, and then, I would make a cup for the bottom to hold the outside Dewar, and then, I'd make an assembly to hold the inside Dewar inside of that one. That's the basic configuration that you would use. Now, the outside one was a plain Dewar. It was already pumped down and sealed. So, that would be in there. Then, the other Dewar in there would have a tap on it, where you could actually open the valve and pump it out, pump the gases out of it. Now, when that was together, one Dewar would be inside the other, like this, see. Now, you would put liquid nitrogen down in the outside one and that would cool the inside one, the outside walls, and then, inside the middle one, we had a special transfer tube that would put liquid helium down in there. It was a big vacuum tube, like a "U" with a proboscis on one end and one on the other end. You'd put that into the helium and just putting that rod in there would generate gas and the pressure would force the helium out of there, over into here. Since this Dewar was already cooled down, the helium would steam up a little bit, but, then, it would settle down and actually start to form a liquid puddle inside there. Then, our unit would be put in there and we'd put a cap on it. Then, we'd have a situation where we could actually hook a vacuum pump up to it and actually start pumping on that, see. The lower the pressure, the lower temperature--that was the way it went. So, the more you pumped it down, the lower the temperature went, and that's how we'd get down to 1.9. Now, that may sound incoherent, what I'm just telling [you], but it's a very complex system and you have other things to worry about, too. When you get this helium in, it was in a cylinder about this big, great, big, surrounded by nitrogen. It was almost the same thing as I'm describing to you if you want to keep it over there. There was an effect there. When you put this big tube in there to transfer some of the helium over, if you didn't do it exactly right, you developed what was called a zirconis effect. That was, putting the hot tube in there would start some of the helium evaporating and, when it did--I used to visualize this, what was happening--you would form vapors, like a powder puff, and it would jump up and hit the ceiling of the tank, and then, bounce back down again and carry heat down to the surface of the helium, which would melt more of it, evaporate more of it. Then, it'd go back up again and it would just keep going like this, which resulted in the whole tank of helium would expend itself and you'd get fumes going down the floor. It was like a nightmare when it happened and you had to really watch yourself, because it could happen really, really easy. Everybody would run when they saw this thing happen. [laughter] They would run. They'd put some distance between them. The nitrogen, this is a side issue here, like, you take [kitchen floor] tiles like this, you want to get them up? You get that tank of nitrogen with a wand on it and just spread it like this--pretty soon, you hear, "Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop." You just go along and gather them up, put them in a pile and take them over the side. You could put a whole new floor down in half an

hour, and, sometimes, we did. You'd get a leak with the nitrogen like that and half the floor in the lab would be up. [laughter]

SI: Was any of this really dangerous?

JL: Yes.

SI: Were there any accidents?

JL: Yes. Now, we had that down--oh, there's a couple things. Don't let me forget that.

SI: I will remind you.

JL: But, we were complaining about the fact that we were being shortchanged in our deliveries of helium. Somebody up there said it was us, that we were sloppy handling it and we were losing it. So, they sent a representative down to check us. He stayed there for a week and he watched. His report to the company was that we handled it better than they did. So, they got off their high horse, that we were wasting it; now, your question.

SI: Any accidents or dangerous situations?

JL: Yes, okay. We also had--handling of these Dewars--when you wanted to bring it back up to temperature again, we had developed a certain procedure to do that. One of them was to put the pump on that inside Dewar. So, as you were warming that thing up--because helium, it's funny, at a certain temperature, will go right through Pyrex--it'll go right in there and you can actually see it inside the vacuum area in there. There's liquid in there. You wonder how in the hell it got there, but, anyway, you've got to make sure you get rid of that, because that's like a four hundred-to-one expansion ratio and that's a bomb. So, you turn that thing on. You start pumping on it, pump on it for a while, and then, you eventually bring the thing up to temperature and we would take it all apart and everything was fine. All of a sudden, somebody wrote up a procedure and it wasn't us. They gave it, "This is the procedure you're going to follow from now on to do this." So, just by coincidence, this one day, I left and went to the head. That's Navy talk. [laughter]

MG: Got you.

JL: Got me. So, when I come back, I find blood all over the floor of the lab, all over the big table and everything else. They followed that procedure and one of the Dewars blew up.

MG: Whose blood was it?

JL: One of the guys working there. The Dewar shattered and put shards of glass all over the place. The place was full of glass and blood--so, tore that sheet up and threw it the hell out and went back to our own procedure again. It's lucky somebody wasn't blinded or something. Fortunately, like I said, I had left the room.

KL: Dad, did you tell them about your research in cryogenics and how University of Pennsylvania wanted to take your vacuum and put it in the museum? We had brought it home for a while, but it was too dangerous to keep and we had to dispose of it.

JL: Oh, that, yes.

MG: Tell us about that.

SI: Yes, please.

JL: No, it was just the Dewars. When I retired, they gave me that as one of the going away presents. Oh, this was the portable thing. I had made portable ones also, so [that] each guy at the bench could have his own setup and stuff like that. That was, like, a two-by-two or, say, a three-by-three piece of plywood with casters on the bottom, so [that] it would roll around. It was four posts coming up and provisions for holding this double Dewar and you could roll it around all over the place. So, they presented me with one of those as a retirement present and I had it out back here for a while. Some of the kids here would go through and I found somebody had poured oil in the damn thing. If they ever broke it ...

KL: That wasn't me.

JL: ... It could be a catastrophe. So, I sent it over to the University of Pennsylvania.

SI: You did, it sounds like, an extraordinary amount of engineering, come up with things on your own. Going back to the dynamic of these teams, would the scientists just say, "I want to do this," and leave you to build something that did it?

JL: Mostly, yes. Like I told you, this one guy, he's still a very good friend of mine, he made that statement once and I heard it. I don't know whether I was supposed to hear it or not, but he said I was worth two engineers.

MG: I think it is so interesting that you walked into RCA on a whim. You did not know what kind of company it was.

JL: That's exactly right.

MG: It turned out to be a really good fit.

JL: See what they almost missed? [laughter] oh, but along those lines, too, this three-channel maser that we were building, I forget what the initial problem was, but it wouldn't go down to temperature or it did go down to temperature--something was wrong. I forget what it was right now, but I was in there on a Saturday one time and I got this idea of enclosing this whole structure that goes into the liquid, enclosing it in what I called a "gas can." That was an assembly that would go over this whole thing and isolate it completely from any liquids actually touching against it. I tried it out once and it didn't work too well, because the thing got cold, but, then, as soon as you tried to energize it, it would switch over and go normal, what they called

normal. So, I got this idea there to put some helium gas in that can before you cooled it down and that did the trick. The helium in there created a proper interface, so that the thing got cold and stayed cold, even when it was operating. We took that to Wallops Island [NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia] and it was installed down there. So, I did that all myself.

KL: Have you mentioned your work on the Trident submarine [submarines that carried the Trident missile], the first nuclear submarine, or your work on communications for the first satellites that went to Mars? You brought home color pictures to show all of us.

JL: [laughter] There's too much.

MG: We have got time.

SI: Yes.

JL: One of the projects I was on, I guess maybe two or three years before I retired, maybe four years before I retired, was the communications equipment for the Trident submarine. It was called (IR-squared?). The thing that I actually worked on was the equipment that exercised the actual communications equipment that was on the submarine, because you had to try it out and set up these conditions and stuff like that. That was the condition that I was working on for a while there and that was a good project, too. I went in there just as a borrowed guy and, next thing you know, I was directing who was building what and making all the cables, and loads of cables go with it. I got a crew of, like, four guys together and we're going to build all these cables. I just broke them up into groups. I said, "You're going to take the one thing and get all the wires according to color codes that they want on the wires. You get all the wires and put them in a bunch, and then, you're going to put this connector on this end and you're going to put the connector on the other end. Then, we're going to take them over and get them," when they weave the either cotton or steel over the outside of them. I forget.

SI: Encased?

JL: Yes, something shielded, "Get them shielded. Then, we're going to bring them back and hook this in and hook that in," and we did that. Then, that went so smooth it was unbelievable. The first thing you know, all the cables that we needed were fabricated. Then, somebody else was there to check them, point to point, one end of the cable to the other, and make sure they were right. They come up, put them right in, worked good. A couple of the racks--we built four of them all together--and a couple of the racks were all just crap, everything just strung in there, hanging down. So, I got them to make up some supports for each side, and then, dressed the ones over and laced them and put them all down the side, so [that] you look in there and see something without seeing a bunch of, like, spaghetti. That was for the Trident submarine. That's the thing, the trailed out antennas that would float on the water for low-frequency communications. From the control room, they could operate the whole submarine, radios and everything. It was beautiful.

SI: Were you actually going down to install it in the submarine or were you just building the assembly that would go down?

JL: No, building the assemblies.

MG: What was your favorite thing that you worked on or that you did?

JL: That's a good question. I guess the one I really, really enjoyed the most, got the biggest kick out of, was the electrostatic printing. I had some things in there, too. They wanted to make some slides. I found out one day, if you took a piece of glass and heated it up, you could put a coating on it and make a slide out of it. I got a patent on that. Nobody'd ever done that before. Another guy, one of the engineers was working, when I first got into it--I used to be a nosy guy. I was into everybody's business, like the midget in the nudist colony. [laughter] Anyway, I'm down there and this guy's doing this. He's trying to separate colors. So, I'm looking at him and I watched him for about five minutes. I said, "Well," I said, "it looks to me like you are separating colors, by exposure." He looked at me and there's this long silence. He's trying to do it by changing the concentrations of this and that and the other thing. I says, "It looks to me like, with what you've got there, just by regulating the amount of exposure of light, you're color separating." There's a patent on that. There's some people down there, like I said before, you have to identify them, smart people, PhDs, they could solve any mathematical problem you give them, but they wouldn't recognize one if they tripped over it themselves, if you can imagine that. There's people like that.

SI: Were you always working in Camden? I know RCA had facilities up north, around Princeton.

JL: I worked in all the different facilities. I worked in Moorestown, which is now Lockheed Martin. I worked in Princeton. Oh, I worked on the checkout at the counters, the supermarkets. I used to do little things. I'd put my nose in, do something and walk away. Like this one guy, he had a series of ballpoint pens all mounted in a holder, spaced accordingly, so [that] when it went down and gave a circle, it made--it wasn't a straight thing like they have now. It was circles. So, as the laser beam went in, it would read it one way and, as it went out, it would read it the other way and double-check each other. So, this thing is chattering. So, I took a look at it, a little bit. "What that needs," I says, "it needs a bypass condenser right here." So, I went and got one and put it on there. Boom, the damn thing settled right down. When I said I generated a lot of troubles myself, about handling the liquid helium and nitrogen again, there was two guys working down the hall, trying to build a Dewar assembly that would hold the stuff like that. Finally, the big boss of the section comes over and he said, "I want you to go down and see what these guys are doing." He said, "They're not making any progress," and stuff like that. So, I went down, took a look and it was obvious what they weren't doing. So, my report was, "It's like the blind leading the blind." That got around, that John said, "These two guys were the blind leading the blind." Neither one of them ever talked to me again. [laughter] Then, another one, he sent me down to another guy, this guy--big Jewish guy, he was--he's working this experiment on the bench and he's not making out too well with it. So, I'm checking and I'm looking and I find out that he's got a big aluminum plate up on the bench. He's got that thing set at about five thousand volts to compensate for something else. "So, what do you think?" I said, "Of course, I don't know," I said, "but I'm going to wait for a scream any minute, because somebody's going to electrocute themselves." I said, "He's got a baseplate in there that's got five thousand volts on it."

So, that was brought to a halt real quick, but they're the kind of things you can get yourself into. I remember another one, I wanted to borrow a certain type of oscilloscope to do something and I couldn't find it anywhere. So, somebody said, "I think John has it down the other lab," another John down there. So, I go down there and I said, "Do you have the WO-79 down here?" He said, "Oh, yes," with a big smile. I said, "Well, I'd like to borrow it." He's, "No, no dice." I says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Are you using it?" He said, "No. It's in the closet." I said, "Well, then, get it the hell out." "No, I'm not getting it out." I said, "Well, let me just put it to you this way." I says, "Either you get it the hell out," I said, "or you're going to have more crap on your hands than you can imagine." [laughter] So, he went and he got it out.

MG: It sounds like there was something about you that stood out or that allowed you to progress in a certain way. You were talking earlier about how you were in a group of eight and you were selected. What kind of qualities do you think you had that they saw in you?

JL: I don't know, just the ability to do things on your own and not to wait for somebody and to pick out the things that were wrong. I remember, I designed a very complex assembly for another Dewar assembly. We went through lots of them down there, over the years. The little boss--not the boss of the whole section, but the little boss--went up to the front office and got the chief mechanical engineer out and brought him back. He said, "What do you think of this?" He said, "Well, what could you do to improve this?" The guy looked at it for a few [minutes]. He says, "Not a damn thing." He says, "That's perfect just the way it is." I took the big magnet apart; me and another guy took the big magnet apart. It was water-cooled and there were coils, like quarter-inch copper, in-between the windings. We found out--and it had inputs and outputs--we found out that one of those things was plugged up with solder. When they had put it together, a pool of solder got down on one of the low ends and plugged up the tube. So, me and this guy, we start taking the thing apart and somebody ran up to the front. "Do you know that John and Danis are taking that magnet apart back there?" The guy says, "So?" [laughter] So, we took it apart. We fixed it and put it back together again, but I had a very, very good career. When I retired, people came from all over the place, and I never said a word, never said a word. Some people didn't know I was retiring until the day I retired. At Sonelli's here, that used to be a big nightclub, they were in there, there were hundreds in there. They all come to see John off.

SI: Could you have stayed longer or did you decide that that was the time you wanted to go?

JL: Oh, I could have, yes. One of them, one of the bosses, said, "Are you sure? You're positive?"

SI: You really had a high opinion of RCA. Did that remain the same over all the years or did it change at all as the company changed?

JL: At the very end, it sort of changed. In fact, I was glad to get out--at the very, very end.

SI: Were they bought by another company then? Was that when GE bought them?

JL: I was out before GE bought them. I was out about a year, and then, GE bought them. Then, there was many other sales since then. So, it's now Lockheed Martin. It was Martin Marietta. Now, do you have anything else there?

SI: Are there any other patents or other things that you worked on that you want to tell us about?

JL: I don't know. I made some little notes in here.

SI: Let me just pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You wanted to say something about FDR, who was the President when you started at RCA.

JL: Correct. Yes, he was the President when I started there and he was President while I was in Hawaii. In the 1944 elections, that was my first year that I was eligible to vote, I voted for him in Hawaii. Then, shortly thereafter, he passed away and Harry did the number with the bomb, which I'm forever grateful, because, I told you before, I would definitely not be here.

SI: Other than dropping the bomb, did you have a high opinion of Harry Truman's Presidency?

JL: When I first heard of Harry, the question was, "Who the hell's Harry?" but it didn't take long for him to exert his will and his knowhow. He turned out to be a very successful President. I consider him one of the best.

SI: You were working at RCA during the Korean War. Did that have any impact on RCA or your life at all? Were you concerned about being recalled?

JL: Oh, no, I wasn't, because I'd made a clean breast of it, really. I wasn't in the Reserves or anything else.

SI: You were working on a production line in the early 1950s, or maybe you were on the test equipment.

JL: No, I think I was past that already, yes.

SI: I wondered if your work had anything to do with the war.

JL: Yes. In the early '50s, I was in test maintenance already, because Patty was born in 1950. I remember just certain things, like, I remember, one day, locking my keys in the car. My wife had to come down and bring Patty with her, because I still see them standing outside there. Patty was an infant. I was already in test maintenance then.

SI: During the Korean War, your projects were not directed towards the military effort there.

JL: Not that I can remember.

SI: Many of them were directed, in a general way, towards the Cold War military complex. Was that something you were cognizant of? Was that a motivation for you and your fellow employees, to beat the Russians?

JL: Not really. I mean, they were so close to World War II that it didn't have, really, that much effect on me. In fact, I don't think--most of the people over here in the Marine Corps League are Korean and Vietnam veterans and we have absolutely nothing in common. When I go over there, they talk about their AK-14s [AK-47s and M-14s] and stuff like that. We had the M-1 and the carbine and various-and-sundry little weapons. We thought we had everything that we ever needed, not knowing what they were going to have now, but two different worlds.

SI: When the Vietnam War came along, you were a parent. Your older son was of draft age then. Did any of your kids go into the military?

JL: He was threatened, yes.

SI: Did you have any conversations with him about what to do?

JL: Well, not with him directly, but I had my own mind made up, what was going to go on, because certain things happened then. One was, Muhammad Ali declared himself a draft dodger on [the] basis of religion. Then, my question was, "What religion condones war?" So, everybody can balk on that basis. My other thought was, which I kept to myself, my wife didn't even know this, that if he ever got a draft notice, I was going to go right down alongside him and I'll say, "He goes right in back of Muhammad." That's what I was going to do. "When Muhammad Ali goes, he's going to be in back of him and he's not going to be in front of him, because we have religion, too." I was very strong about that. [Editor's Note: On June 20, 1967, boxing champion Muhammad Ali was convicted of draft evasion after more than a year of public acts of civil disobedience regarding his being drafted.]

SI: We talked a little bit about this area. It was very rural when you first moved here. There were fewer houses. What have been some of the biggest changes you have seen in the Haddon Township area over your nearly sixty years here?

JL: Yes, sixty-four; [laughter] not really much, yes. Of course, my friend, that same friend of mine, when he comes over here, he says it's amazing. He says this neighborhood always looks the same, same people. Now, recently, there's been an upheaval. You get a certain period of time and all the people of a certain age sort of manage to disappear and all that sort of stuff. That's what's happened here. There isn't a single person around here now that was here when we moved, none. This is a long block. It goes all the way down to the railroad. This is, like, two blocks long and I think we are the oldest and the senior people here. Sometimes, I feel we should move. [laughter]

SI: You mentioned in the first interview that you have been talking about your World War II experiences in schools.

JL: Yes.

SI: When did you start doing that?

JL: Oh, about 1995.

SI: Around the same time you joined the Marine Corps League.

JL: Yes. I never did it before. I had other invitations to do it, but I was of a certain mindset. I saw all these little, what I call nitwits, walking around with their pants down to their knees and stuff like that. I said, "If I ever get into a classroom and somebody gives me some crap, I'll kill them. So, the best thing to do is not go." So, I didn't go, but, then, I had that invitation to talk to the Historical Society and I did that. Then, after that, I start talking to other people. I talked to--these organizations for business and stuff like that.

SI: A chamber of commerce?

JL: Yes, like that, and the ...

MG: Rotary.

JL: Rotary, there we go, the Rotary, yes. I talked to three different Rotary clubs at the diners. They make arrangements at the diners. We go there. I talked to an old-age home over in Moorestown. I talked to the Over 65-Year Club in Haddonfield. I talked to a Model-A club in Philadelphia.

SI: What is a Model A club?

JL: People that have Model-A Fords.

SI: Wow.

JL: It's funny now. I talked to several of these people. Now, the old-age home--I say old-age home, I'm older than most of them [laughter]--anyway, the woman over there had the people all around the table, like a long table. The older folks came in and sat down, stuff like that. When it was all over, she'd come over to me and she said, "This is the first time we've had a talk here that none of the listeners fell asleep." [laughter] So, I thought that was good.

MG: Had you been telling your story previously? Did you talk about the war when you came home, to your family or other veterans?

JL: I didn't talk to anybody. In fact, my middle daughter said, "All these years, I never heard a word." In fact, a couple of the people that I worked with--since I've retired, we have a meeting out here at a restaurant called the Coastline--and I went in there just about the time that Clint Eastwood had *Flags of Our Fathers* out [in 2006]. One of them said, "You son of a bitch." I said, "Oh, God, here we go. It's time for;" [laughter] but he said, "No," he said, "I've been

working with you for thirty years." He said, "Never heard a single word about this thing." I said, "Well, why should it come up?" At the Model A club, a little woman--there was men and women in there--she came up and she says, "I could listen to you talk for all day." So, they're nice little compliments. That's happened about three different times, "I could listen to you all day."

SI: Since 1995, have you become involved in other veteran groups or only the League?

JL: No. I go down to Washington. In fact, I just came back from Washington in February, me and my youngest son and his son. We went down as a three-generation thing and it was the sixty-ninth anniversary of the flag raising on Iwo Jima. I go down there. They used to run it every five years, but, then, as time grew short, they changed it to every year. So, now, it's every year. Next February's going to be the seventieth anniversary and they're going to make a big thing out of that. So, I know, if I'm still here, I'll be down there, me and my son, Paul, and my little grandson. So, we just came back from there. There aren't too many vets, but what there are are descendants of the vets. Like, in my case, I had two with me and one of the other guys had his son with him and stuff like that. They participate and things are nice. An interesting thing is, when we're down there, on a Friday--it's always on a Friday--we'd go from our hotel down to the Marine Corps Museum in Triangle, Virginia. We'd get on the bus--and we used to go on, like, eight buses and, this time, we went on one--but, when we get out on 95, the state troopers from Virginia get out there and clear 95. They stop all the traffic from coming on. We go zipping through there. It's interesting.

SI: Is there anything else you want to add to the record? Going back to your life in this area, were you involved in the fire department, first aid, community activities?

JL: No. Like I said before, we used to work many, many hours and all of my interest was what I was doing in the RCA. I used to do a lot of traveling for them, like I said. I used to go to Canada, California, Arizona, upstate Pennsylvania. I used to go to Boston, Arthur D. Little. You ever hear of Arthur D. Little up there? That's basically a scientific company and they make one of the refrigerators that we used to use. When I used to go up there, I used to fly into Logan and I used to hire a helicopter and get in that thing and they would take me out there to Arthur D. Little, because it was all the way across the City of Boston. I think I drove it once and I said, "Never again." So, I go up there, beautiful. At the airport, you get on the chopper and it's just like on a big, gigantic swing, because the thing leans forward. You're on a big swing that never goes back the other way. You just go over. They land you right on the roof and you tell them what time you're leaving on what day. I remember, when I was leaving, one of the times, it was Friday, I'd say, "Friday, four o'clock," at about a quarter to four, I'd go up on the roof and the first thing you'd hear [Mr. Lauriello imitates helicopter blades]. In the distance, you see this chopper coming. It'd come over, land on the roof and take you back to Logan. Then, they used to take you out to Fisherman's Wharf or something like that and lobster Newberg and, oh, God, show me your lobster Newberg. Do you have something?

MG: We talked a lot about your career at RCA, but I am curious about how the rest of your life unfolded and memories and milestones with your family.

JL: Now?

MG: No, since or outside of work. What stands out to you now in terms of your family?

JL: Oh, yes. Well, we had a place built down the seashore in 1957, when my middle daughter was born. That was her year. She was one year old our first year in the place. We had that for forty-two years. Between maintaining this, maintaining that, maintaining two cars, and I had a thirty-six-foot boat for offshore fishing, maintaining that and getting them stored and putting the water off and putting it on, all those little things all mesh together and it was a continuous parade.

MG: You had your hands full.

JL: Oh, definitely, and five kids.

SI: Where was the house?

JL: Brigantine.

MG: You were involved in technology and electronics for so long. How have you seen technology change and what do you think of all the advances?

JL: Oh, the technology, absolutely. Well, I worked there for forty-two years and, when I was there, I was abreast of everything. I mean the black-and-white TVs, I could tell you every tube in there by number and what they did, but, now, when I see these flat-screen TVs and these little things that you carry around, I don't have a clue, not a damn clue, as to how they work.

MG: I do not, either.

JL: [laughter] I don't even use them, but I see them put their finger on the thing and they move the whole screen over.

SI: My three-year-old daughter can work the iPad better than I can.

JL: I know. My youngest son, like I said, he's got two children of his own. One just turned fourteen. That's the one who went down. The little girl is one year behind. She's thirteen. They're both whizzes at it. We go down there and we'll say, "How do you do this and how do you do that?" "Oh, this is what you have to do first, before you do that," and all.

SI: How many grandchildren and great-grandchildren do you have?

JL: Eleven and one.

SI: Eleven and one.

JL: Yes. Well, actually, I have ten. One of my grandsons got killed in an automobile crash about sixteen years ago. He would have been thirty-two now, because he was about sixteen when he died. That was sort of a setback, but it's been a long time now, sixteen years.

SI: Do you have any other questions?

MG: I am curious about how you may be different because of your military experience. I was struck by that story you told about the guy you suspected of stealing. It turned out you were right. Was that an instinct you gained because of your experience?

JL: I think it was insights that you gained, yes. You get to measure people up. I've always considered myself a very, very good judge of character and it almost always works out that way, right. As far as my--oh, I don't know--everyday living and stuff like that, I know it's been tough, because, once you're in there, you're tough. Little things that bother the normal person don't have one iota on you. Like, my oldest daughter was running her bicycle off the curb and the fender caught her big toenail and took it, like, ninety-five percent of the way off. So, all of sudden [Mr. Lauriello imitates his daughter yelling]. I took it the rest of the way off and put a bandage on it and that's the end of that, but I know that you don't appreciate the little things that normal people do appreciate. I know we had a lot of trouble over that, "I don't care. I'm cold," this and [that]--it's not that. It's just that you've seen so much that these are insignificant. I know that for a fact and I'm not alone. In the earlier days, when I met some of the other guys that I was with, they're all dead now, except one, but we would talk about things like this, how that affected our livelihood and our interference with other people and stuff like that. You learned the difference between bullshit and straight talk and you'd use it. I know one guy--is this on now?

SI: I will turn it off.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Thank you for answering all our questions today and for sitting down with us again.

JL: You're quite welcome.

SI: We really appreciate the opportunity to interview you; thank you for all your time with the documentary project, also.

JL: That's good. I enjoyed it all. It's been a pleasure meeting you. It's been a pleasure meeting you, Molly.

MG: Thank you. This has been such a treat for me.

SI: Thank you for your service, too.

JL: Yes. You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/1/2014
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/9/2014
Reviewed by John P. Lauriello 9/9/2014